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EARLIER AND LATER VERSIONS OF THE FRIENDSHIP-THEME. I

"DAMON AND PYTHIAS"

The ideal and touching friendship exemplified by the Pythagorean disciples commonly known as "Damon and Pythias"¹ has found its most effective literary treatment in Schiller's ballad "Die Bürgschaft." The numerous references by ancient writers² to so notable an example of fidelity and constancy have failed to inspire and arouse the creative imagination of the world's greatest poets save that of Schiller.

For many centuries the subject itself seems to have been ignored until, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, its moral and ethical significance came to be recognized by a monkish writer. Religious didactic literature, both prose and verse, was then well developed, and among the forms in which the material came to be presented the allegory was both common and popular. Chief among the moralizing works of this sort was the *Gesta Romanorum*,³ which was most widely known among the clergy and which became a favorite source of sermon literature. The fact that among the various kinds of games both chess and cards⁴ were treated symbolically speaks for the general familiarity with, and the popularity of, this sort of pastime among the better classes.⁵ It is in connection with one of such symbolical works that we find the appearance of the Damon and Pythias account in mediaeval literature.

¹ Critical investigation shows "Pinthias" to be the correct form. It is to no purpose to discuss here how or when the current name "Pythias" came to be accepted. It may be noted, however, that the names of the two friends are not uniformly given by the earliest writers. Valerius Maximus writes "Phintias" on the basis of Greek sources which have *Φιντίας*. Cicero *De off.*, gives "Pynthias," while Hyginus, Schiller's source, has the two names of "Moeros and Selinuntios."

² Iamblich. et Porphy. *Vit. Pythagor.*; Diodor. Sic. x. 4; Plutarch *De amic. mult.* 2. Cicero *De off.* iii. 10. 45; Tusc. v. 22; Maximus *Memorab.* iv. 7. ext. 1.

³ H. Oesterley's ed. (Berlin, 1872), under No. 108 gives the Damon and Pythias story. For additional references to other versions see the notes on this story.

⁴ Breitkopf, *Urspr. d. Spielkarten*, p. 9, asserts that the card game was of French origin; its introduction into Germany dates from about 1300. A symbolical treatment of the cards was by Brother John, a monk, entitled *Ludus cartularum moralisatus*, 1377.

⁵ On the origin and popularity of the game of chess, cf. F. Vetter, *Das Schachzettelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen*, Frauenfeld, 1892, cap. 2. Symbolical treatment of the subject appeared as early as 1180 in *De naturis rerum* by Alexander of Neckham, and in Joh. Gallensis' *Summa Collacionum*, Paris, about 1260. Among the many later works cf. Benjamin Franklin, *The Morals of Chess*, 1787.

The work in question is that of the Lombard monk, Jacobus de Cessolis (Casalis, Cassolis, Casulius, Cessola, so named from his supposed birthplace in Picardy), master at Rheims. His moral adaptations of chess in which the various chess-figures symbolized the different classes of society, and the movements of the figures served to illustrate all sorts of relations and conditions of men, were first in the form of sermons, but were later put into verse. The effect of this didactic work was increased by the interlarding of tales and illustrative material from ancient or biblical sources. Among the mass of material so used by him was the story of Damon and Pythias. His entire treatise appeared in Latin in the forepart of the fourteenth century.¹

Two notable translations into French were made in 1347 by Jean Ferron, and before 1350 by Jean de Vignay. The last-named work was the basis of Caxton's English version which appeared between 1475 and 1480.²

More of the nature of adaptations to the work of De Cessolis³ were the various elaborations of ecclesiastical writers in Germany during the early fourteenth century. Their aim at popularizing their didactic efforts resulted in writing the "Schachbücher" or "Schachzabelbücher." The earliest of these was the *Schachzabelbuch* (1338) of Kunrat (Konrad) von Ammenhausen,⁴ a parish priest of Stein on the Rhine. While this is a free adaptation of De Cessolis, the work of Heinrich von Beringen⁵ (about 1300) seems to be more closely related to the original work of De Cessolis. Both writers incorporate the story of Damon and Pythias.

The spread of the work to Northern Germany is seen in the elaboration of the *Pfarrer zu dem Hechte* (1335).⁶ The account of the "Bürgschaft" here contains three rather interesting lines:

¹ *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludos scacchorum*. There are about 80 manuscripts in Latin; the oldest existing is that of Milan, 1479.

² *The Game of Chess* by William Caxton, reproduced in facsimile by V. Figgins, London, 1860; W. Blades, *The Biography and Topography of William Caxton*, England's first printer, 1877.

³ For bibliography of the various versions cf. Vetter, p. xli, note.

⁴ Cf. Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch*, Frauenfeld, 1992; also Kürschner, *DNL*, XII, Introduction. Konrad's work was excerpted and plagiarized by Jakob Mennel of Constance in his *Schachzabel* of 1506. Konrad's source was a manuscript of 1365, now in Heidelberg.

⁵ Cf. *DNL*, XII, ed. by Zimmermann (*Lit. Ver. Stuttgart.*, Vol. CLXVI).

⁶ *DNL*, XII, 142, ed. Zfd. A., XVII, 162 f.

der liz he den gesellin
 dem Kunge do czu burgin
 vor sinuz halsiz wurgin,

which find a parallel rhyme in Schiller's lines:

Ich lasse den Freund dir als Bürgen,
 Ihn magst du, entrinn' ich, erwürgen.

In each of these accounts referred to, the tyrant Dionysus, in keeping with Valerius Maximus' recital, which Jacobus de Cessolis seems to have followed, makes request to be adopted into the friendship of these two men ("Eosque insuper rogavit, ut in societatem amicitie ad tertium gradum sodalicii reciperent"). But the introduction of elements of danger as obstacles to a speedy return which gives added interest and suspense to the story is unknown in these as well as in the oldest references except that of Hyginus.

A departure from the story by the preceding is taken up in the work of Meister Stephan of Dorpat (about 1350), who wrote in Low German.¹ Here the one friend bears the name of "Physius," and the punishment to which he is condemned is that of hanging.

In addition to the "Schachbücher," the incorporation of the "Damon and Pinthias" motive is also found in the work *Blumen der Tugent*, written in 1411 by a Tyrolese nobleman, Hans Vintler.² Curiously the names of the two friends are given there as Amon, a youth, and Physoia, a woman. The latter becomes the hostage for her friend, who has been condemned to death by decapitation. Aside from these peculiarities the account fails to mention the adoption of the tyrant into the friendship of the two.

The omission of the last-named element, which is one of the essential parts of the original account, is also a characteristic of the moralizing tale of the fifteenth century entitled *Der Seele Trost*, by Joh. Moritz Schulze.³ The subject material seems to have been divided according to the order of the ten commandments. The

¹ *DNL*, XII, pp. 1 and 5 f. Ed. M. Stephan's *Schachbuch*, Dorpat.

² Zingler (*Zfd. Philol.*, II, 185) believed that it was the oldest German treatment of the subject, a view no longer tenable, since Konrad's work antedates it by seventy-four years. The manuscript is in the British Museum. An old edition published in Lübeck, about 1489, is now in the library at Lübeck.

³ Kürschner, *loc. cit.*, p. 477. Excerpts in *Zfd. Mdarten*, I, 174 f.; II, 1 f.; II, 289 f. Frommann's *D. Mda.*, I, ii, 9.

story itself does not refer to any desire on the part of the tyrant to join in their friendship after the exhibition of fidelity and vicariousness on their part; he merely pardons the offender.

Barring Caxton's¹ translation, previously referred to, in which the account of Damon and *Phisias* is briefly told, there seems to be no evidence to show the treatment of this motif in England prior to Elizabethan times. To Richard Edwards belongs the distinction of having utilized the theme for dramatic presentation in his *Damon and Pithias*,² which the prologue declares to be a "tragicall-comedie." A cast of twelve characters presented this play before Queen Elizabeth, we are told, and aimed to show how these friends were

All one in effete, all one in their goynge,
All one in their study, all one in their doynge,

and how

true love had joynd in perfect amytie.

The moralizing intent of the play appears in the epilogue in which the author emphasizes

no friendship is sure, but that which is groundd
on vertue.

The plot of the play shows Damon and Pithias as travelers in the tyrant's city. A sycophant, to whom Damon had addressed a few inquiries, by false accusation causes Damon to be arrested as a spy. The furious tyrant condemns him to die "by the sworde or the wheele the next day" or to have his head "stroken off."

The condemned man requests time to set his worldly things in order. Pithias offers himself as a hostage, whereupon two months are granted, after which time Pithias is to "hang" or "lose his head."

The introduction of a rough scene in which Stephano, the servant of Damon, gives the false accuser of his master a sound drubbing may have been a concession to popular taste. After Damon has

¹ The impression made on the King, and the moral given in Caxton's work: "the Kyng was gretely abasshyd. and for the grete trouthe that was founden in hym/he pardenyd hym and prayed hem bothe that they wold receyue hym as theyr grete frende and felowe. lo here the vertues of loue/that a man ought not to doubte the deth for his frende/lo what it is to doo for a frende. and to lede a lyf debonayr/and to be wyth out cruelte. to loue & not to hate/whyche causeth to doo good ayeast euyl. and to torne payne in to benefete and to quenche cruelte."

² Published in 1571 and in 1582. Reproduced in R. Dodsley, *Old Plays*, London, 1825, I, 157-262.

returned, each beseeches the other to permit him to offer himself as a sacrifice. The King is much affected and pardons Damon, after which he hears a harangue on friendship. At the conclusion of the play the tyrant is adopted into their friendship.

A dramatic version of the story also appeared in France from the pen of Samuel Chappuzeau¹ (1625–1701), a minor dramatist who, like most of his contemporaries, drew largely from Latin sources. His recognition as a writer does not rest merely on the fact that the Elzevirs published one or two of his comedies—Molière is indebted to him for several plots. His poverty led him to change the titles of his works in order to have them reprinted and thus gain a new source of revenue. Thus we have *Damon et Pythias*² and its reprinted form, *Les Parfaits Amis, ou le Triomphe de l'Amour et de l'Amitié, Tragi-comédie*. The drama was first acted in Paris toward the end of 1656.

Chappuzeau's plot:³ Damon and Pythias, two young Thessalian nobles, each find at Syracuse the lady of their love, and are happy in anticipation of their marriage. A jealous rival attacks Pythias and is killed. Dionysius condemns the murderer, but grants him three months' grace to set his affairs in order, while Damon becomes hostage for him. The action begins with the last day of the three months allotted for Pythias' return. Sophrosyne is less anxious for Pythias' return, while Doride, for love of Damon, reproaches Pythias. Damon is constant and hopeful, and his loyalty to his friend conquers his love. "L'honneur plus que l'amour tous les grans coeurs maitrise" (Act III, sc. 2). Pythias, mindful of his obligation, hastens his return and appears, despite obstacles and chicanery of friends, in the nick of time. The tyrant's heart is softened and he liberates both, saying:

Votre amitié me charme et je pretens moy-même
 Dans le commerce aimable entrer comme troisième.

J. F. L. RASCHEN

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[To be concluded]

¹ Fournel, *Les Contempor. de Molière*, Paris, 1863, pp. 357 f.; S. Chappuzeau, *Le Théâtre français*, Paris, 1876; Friedr. Meinel, *S. Chappuzeau*, dissertation, Leipzig, 1908.

² The first edition appeared at Amsterdam in 1657, the second in 1672 without place or publisher's name; a third edition appeared in Amsterdam in 1705.

³ Chappuzeau claims Cicero and Valerius Maximus as his sources.